Nova Scotia
Speech From The Throne

Her Honour
The Honourable Myra A. Freeman, O.N.S., B.A., B.Ed
Lieutenant Governor

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For the Second Session of the Fifty-Ninth General Assembly
Nova Scotia House of Assembly

Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the second session of the 59th General Assembly.

It has been just over three years since my government tabled its last Speech from the Throne.

My government comes here today proud of the progress Nova Scotia has made in those three years.

And we come here today to share with Nova Scotians how, with their help, we will build on that progress and overcome many of the social, economic, and environmental challenges we know we still face.

We come here, as well, to pay tribute to our former premier, John Hamm, a good friend to every member of this house, and a great champion of Nova Scotia.

In the six and a half years the Honourable Member for Pictou Centre served as premier, Nova Scotia witnessed many firsts, many milestones.

While many will remember his success in getting Nova Scotia's fiscal house in order and in bringing a new level of economic prosperity to our province, many others will remember him for all that he did to support families in need.

The members of this house also express our gratitude to the men and women who have served, and continue to serve, in our military. While the Year of the Veteran has passed, our deep appreciation for what they have sacrificed remains constant.

We know it was their courage and sacrifice that have guaranteed our right to take our place in this house today and to freely debate the issues of concern to Nova Scotians.

We thank them and the men and women who continue to put their lives in harm's way so all of us can continue to enjoy our peace and freedom.

My government also notes with sadness the passing of many Nova Scotians who enriched their province in the service of others. Among them, the Honourable Robert Lorne Stanfield, the Honourable Terence R. B. Donahoe, Senator Calvin Ruck, Shirley Elliott, Charles Keating, Lieutenant Chris Saunders, Doctor David Rippey, Corporal Paul James Davis, Rear Admiral Desmond Piers (retired), Robert Shaw, Private Braun Woodfield, Captain Derek Nichols, Sherman Zwicker, Sandy Cameron, and Sister Peggy Butts.

And it is with deep regret that all members of this House express their condolences to our friend and former colleague Danny Graham, who just this week lost his wife Sheelagh after a hard-fought battle with cancer. Our hearts and prayers are with him, his sons Patrick, Andrew, and Colin, the Nolan family, and Sheelagh and Danny's many friends.

My government's firm and full commitment

My government acknowledges the tremendous contributions that those who came before us have made in service to their fellow Nova Scotians, and we are determined to serve their memories proudly by building on their legacies. My government recognizes that the decisions we make today will have an impact on Nova Scotians well into the future. To that end, we remain firmly and fully committed to the following:

Our decisions will help Nova Scotia families reach their full potential and make our communities stronger, safer, more caring, and better connected.

Our decisions will promote the health and well-being of our citizens and preserve and protect our valued quality of life.

Our decisions will create a climate of greater optimism and bring increased investment that will lead to greater prosperity that all Nova Scotians can share.

Our decisions will strengthen—never jeopardize—Nova Scotia's fiscal health and well-being.

And every decision we take will respect the values and the principles that contribute to our pride as a people and our pride in our province.

They will recognize government's rightful role, value diversity, be based on fairness, and always be made with the greater good of Nova Scotians at heart.

Supporting families, strengthening communities, building brighter futures

The health and well-being of Nova Scotians, their families, and communities is crucial, not just to an individual's quality of life, but to Nova Scotia's overall prosperity, with many factors coming to bear on each. Education levels, income levels, housing standards, and the quality of our air and water are just a few. Government's role is not to intrude on an individual's decisions, but to give them the knowledge and means to make the best possible choices for themselves and their families. And government's role is not to tell communities what they must do to achieve greater prosperity, but to help them acquire the information, tools, and support they need to find their own ways to thrive.

My government knows that, despite the considerable fiscal, economic, and social progress Nova Scotia has witnessed in recent years, too many Nova Scotians are in need, too many families are under stress, and too many communities under pressure.

That is why, through whatever avenues are open to us and with whatever resources we have available to us, we will work to make life easier.

It is why we will introduce a new children's Pharmacare program for working families of modest means—a measure that will improve the health of many Nova Scotia children, reduce the financial pressures on their parents, reduce demands on hospital emergency services, and further support our government's efforts to keep working families working.

It is why we will provide more Nova Scotians with affordable housing and more parents with the child-care options they need and deserve.

My government will increase funding for senior and low-income housing repairs and do more to assist families who provide love and support to our foster children.

It is also why we will enhance post-adoption services for children with disabilities, extend the bursary program for children in care, and raise the shelter allowance for Income Assistance recipients.

And it is why we will continue to provide financial help so low-income diabetics can better manage their disease and, once again, raise the shelter allowance for Income Assistance recipients.

My government is working to lighten the load for individuals and families in need.

Communities ... the backbone of Nova Scotia

My government knows that caring, dedicated volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Volunteers are tireless friends who believe in human dignity and giving back to their communities. They know that to rise above adversity and to be the very best that we can be, we need each other.

Nova Scotians volunteer more hours per year than any other province in Canada. My government is proud of Nova Scotia's strong culture of volunteerism. And we will make it a top priority.

My government has made volunteerism one of the key principles of Nova Scotia's Community Development Policy. We will provide clear leadership for this important work by appointing a minister responsible for volunteerism and will take concrete actions to respond to the recommendations of the Nova Scotia Canada Volunteerism Initiative Network.

The needs of communities and the needs of volunteers are intrinsically linked. Responding to the needs of one will positively impact the health and well-being of the other. My government will grow and support our vital voluntary sector.

My government recognizes that sustainable communities are crucial to the future strength and prosperity of Nova Scotia. That is why we will continue to support the development of collaborative approaches with communities that build on our combined skills, resources, and resourcefulness.

My government is committed to addressing the challenges facing many of our communities and will act on every opportunity to help them thrive and prosper.

My government knows that our schools are much more than places for our students to learn. They are very often the local meeting spot for community groups and the substitute for the local community theatre or recreation centre. Parents, municipal representatives, and other community members have expressed concern about the process used when considering permanent school closures. My government is reviewing this process, to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of students, parents, communities, and the education system.

Additionally, recognizing that all schools are a vital community asset, but not accessible because of the high cost of liability insurance, my government will make these costs more affordable and make our schools a more welcoming place.

Nova Scotia is known as a safe place to live and raise a family. But my government recognizes that there is growing concern that our quiet streets and peaceful neighbourhoods could be in jeopardy. My government also knows that only a small percentage of offenders are responsible for the majority of criminal offences. We will take concrete action. We will establish a Youth Attendance Centre that requires young Nova Scotians in conflict with the law to participate in a range of programs designed to keep them from becoming re-offenders.

Additionally, my government will reintroduce the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, introduce the Criminal Notoriety Act, and Crystal Methadone Restriction legislation. We will also enhance resources to more closely track potential serial offenders, and continue to improve on-the-ground intelligence in the fight against organized crime.

Learning ... the gateway to success

My government knows that learning doesn't begin in grade primary and doesn't end at graduation. That is why my government will soon announce increased funding for early childhood learning through to adult learning.

We will also carry through with the commitments outlined in *Learning for Life II*, which focuses on the fundamentals, further reduces class sizes, expands supports for students with special needs, offers more advanced courses for gifted students, and calls for greater accountability throughout our public school system.

These measures, combined with more teachers and resource specialists, more books and teaching aids, will help more of our students find success in school and in life.

But my government knows that far too many Nova Scotians who are eager to learn continue to fall through the cracks. My government has introduced a number of initiatives to reach out to these students to keep them in school, to keep them learning, and to provide them the opportunity for a better future here at home. But more needs to be done and will be done. We will expand existing programs to encourage trades training. We will place greater emphasis on career counselling and introduce more hands-on training and composite programming in our high schools and in our communities.

My government will also support the diverse needs of our students and will take further actions to implement the recommendations of the Black Learners Advisory Committee Report.

Nova Scotia is fortunate to be home to 11 degree-granting institutions, a number of which have been recognized as the best in the country. We also have a first-rate community college system that

offers a broad range of trades and technical skills training to thousands of Nova Scotians throughout the province.

My government recognizes the important contribution both make to our academic success as well as our economic prosperity. That is why my government signed Nova Scotia's first multi-year funding agreement with our universities and made a 10-year, $123-million commitment for the modernization and expansion of our community colleges.

And while there is no question that a post-secondary education increases an individual's employment and income potential, the cost of a university education remains daunting for most Nova Scotia families. My government's goal is to make the cost of obtaining a typical undergraduate degree in Nova Scotia comparable to the national average within five years.

In addition, my government will further enhance and more aggressively promote Nova Scotia's student loan forgiveness programs and take measures to help more students of middle-income families access student loans. We will reduce the parental contribution threshold, and the payment schedule will take into consideration the student's ability to pay as they enter the work force.

Promoting good health ... protecting public health

Nothing is more important to Nova Scotians than their health, and the health of their families.

Unfortunately, Nova Scotia has among the highest chronic disease and disability rates in the country, and far too many Nova Scotians still make lifestyle choices that compromise their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Three years ago, my government demonstrated its commitment to help Nova Scotians become healthier by creating Canada's first Office of Health Promotion.

Recently, we brought the offices of Health Promotion and the Chief Medical Officer together with the Population and Public Health division of the Department of Health. The integration of these vital services not only strengthens our ability to implement healthy public policies, it better prepares Nova Scotia for emerging health threats.

My government wants Nova Scotians to become healthier and to live longer, more productive lives.

That is why, for the third year in a row, we will increase funding for health promotion activities.

We will move forward with a number of important strategies already under way to prevent Nova Scotians from making lifestyle choices that come with consequences: smoking, excessive drinking, drug use, and problem gambling.

And we will continue our work to prevent injury and falls.

My government will also continue to actively promote—in our classrooms and boardrooms, in our doctors' offices and restaurants—what Nova Scotians can do to become more healthy. We will advance strategies that promote healthy eating, healthy sexuality, and increased physical activity, particularly as it relates to children and youth.

As well, my government will undertake a number of other important measures designed to help our children lead healthier, more active, more fulfilling lives, including:

- enhancing the provincial income tax credit for parents whose children participate in organized sport and recreation programs

- implementing Nova Scotia's first Food and Nutrition Policy for Public Schools
- piloting a new program to strengthen physical activity leadership at the municipal level
- and we will begin discussions with school officials to make physical education a mandatory high school credit beginning in the 2007–2008 school year

Our goal is to make every generation of young Nova Scotians healthier than the one before it.

Our goal is to slow the growing pressures on a health-care system under stress.

Meeting Nova Scotia's health-care needs

Like all Canadians, Nova Scotians want to know that when they need health care it will be there for them.

My government is determined to see that it is.

But more than that, my government is determined to see that it is faster care, better care, care that is closer to home.

To that end, we will once again be making significant new investments to ensure that Nova Scotians get the care they need when they need it.

These investments will enable us to train and recruit the right mix of health-care professionals, to pay for the increased cost and utilization of cancer and other life-saving drugs, and to provide more vital services, such as dialysis and palliative care, in more communities throughout our province.

The most recent federal budget guaranteed shorter wait times. My government will work hand in hand with Ottawa to reduce wait times in Nova Scotia.

Shaping the future of Continuing Care

Nova Scotia's aging population, combined with some of the country's highest chronic disease and disability rates, brings with it increased demand for in-home and long-term care services. My government recently concluded extensive consultations involving 1,400 Nova Scotians to better determine Nova Scotia's needs and to develop an insightful approach to respond to this challenge. We are responding.

We will shortly release a long-term strategy that sets the course for putting Nova Scotia on the right path to provide the right level of care, at the right time, and for all of the right reasons. Through our Continuing Care Strategy, Nova Scotians will see that when it comes to making sound policy investment decisions, we are a government that creates long-term, sustainable, community-based solutions that result in better care.

Sound policy decisions, based on thoughtful planning, will also guide us as we look toward Nova Scotia's economic potential.

A modern, competitive, greener province

My government will act decisively. We will advance fresh ideas for building a modern, competitive, greener province.

My government's updated economic growth strategy moves our province in an exciting new direction. *Opportunities for Sustainable Prosperity 2006* demonstrates an understanding of Nova Scotia's place in a rapidly changing world and recognizes that sustainable competitiveness is about more than healing the split between economy and environment. It's about uniting the best interests of Nova Scotia—business, ecology, and social development. It's about capitalizing on global trends, eliminating waste, and encouraging innovation to achieve sustainable growth and international competitiveness.

This year, we will support the conversion of the system that heats the Nova Scotia Hospital, the Dartmouth General Hospital, and the Nova Scotia Community College. Currently it burns high-sulphur oil. Soon it will be fuelled by natural gas—environmentally friendly and cost effective.

The most competitive economies today are those that make the best use of their natural resources, of the skills and ingenuity of their people, and of their geographic advantages. Nova Scotia offers the best of all.

Opportunities for Sustainable Prosperity builds on the spirit and intent of the Come to Life initiative. My government will continue to promote our province's distinct quality of life. We will continue to spread the word about Nova Scotia as a great place to live, invest, do business, get an education, and visit. And we will continue to enhance Nova Scotia's pride of place and global presence by emphasizing our best qualities—our people, our products, and our province.

The Come to Life initiative will also implement an expatriate recruitment program to attract information technology workers back to the province to ensure we have the workforce needed to further grow our IT sector. And while we are promoting our competitive advantages to the world, we will be strengthening our global connections at home.

My government is embarking on a bold vision to ensure that by the year 2010, every Nova Scotian will have broadband access to the Internet—in many cases, through wireless connectivity.

Achieving broadband access to the Internet in every community throughout Nova Scotia is as important today as electricity and telephones were in the past. In the not too distant future, Nova Scotians will be able to access information and make connections wherever they are.

This will not happen overnight. But we will move ahead rapidly to implement wireless connectivity pilots. We foresee a day when we will look back at this initiative as the critical step we took to secure Nova Scotia's place in the future.

Building optimism, better business climate

My government will respond to the concerns of Nova Scotians. We will reduce taxes and regulate gas prices. We will enhance business competitiveness, grow our cultural industries, and seize trade opportunities. We will expand tourism marketing and improve our highways, roads, and bridges.

My government knows that achieving and sustaining prosperity requires the right mix of consumer choice and market stability, the right balance of business freedom and regulatory protection, the right blend of investment in marketing and infrastructure improvements. We will strive to achieve balance to ensure we strengthen families and build a better business climate.

To that end:

- We will lower taxes to help our families and our businesses.
- We will remove uncertainty at the pumps by providing more stability in the retail gas industry, in an environment that ensures flexibility and timely response to radical price shifts.

- We will implement our Better Regulation Initiative to eliminate over-regulation, duplication, and unnecessary paperwork. We will not compromise public safety, the environment, or our communities, but we will relieve the burden that unnecessary regulations put on Nova Scotia businesses. We will take concrete steps to ensure that regulations make sense and achieve the desired results in a way that supports business growth.
- We will continue to support our artists and artisans, musicians, and museums to more fully realize the economic and cultural benefits of our wealth of talent, creativity, and heritage.
- We will launch the Gateway Strategy to ensure that Nova Scotia is positioned to capture a significant share of the surging growth in trade traffic between North America and Asia.

My government also recognizes the importance of our tourism industry, which accounts for $1.3 billion annually and employs 32,000 people. With a clear goal to increase tourism revenues, we will implement the key priorities of the 2006 Tourism Plan.

Developed by the Nova Scotia Tourism Partnership Council, the plan recommends enhancing signature attractions and strengthening tourism marketing efforts in both existing and new markets, as well as improving transportation access to Nova Scotia.

Whether we are sending products to Dallas or bringing tourists to Digby, this government knows there is a vital link between infrastructure and a strong economy. Since 2000, capital funding for road, highway, and bridge improvements has more than tripled. My government will continue to twin major 100-series highways and improve our rural roads. We will continue to make the safety of our motorists, the enjoyment of our visitors, and the efficiency of our trade routes a government priority.

My government will also launch Nova Scotia's Infrastructure Strategy, *Route to Prosperity*, to identify challenges, priorities, and the broad linkages between capital infrastructure investments.

My government knows that infrastructure is the means by which our communities are connected to each other, and our province is connected to the world. Infrastructure is vital to the economic expansion of our communities and the quality of life of our citizens.

During the past seven years, the province lived within its means, creating budget surpluses, lowering debt, and improving our credit rating, so taxpayers pay less for ongoing debt. We will continue to do this, and we will also meet our debt-reduction targets in 2007–2008.

We are now in a position to begin reinvesting more in our infrastructure, to make life better for all Nova Scotians. While continuing to balance competing priorities, we will build a foundation for business success and international competitiveness, and meet the needs and improve services for people across the province—wherever they live.

That is why my government will invest more than $1 billion in infrastructure renewal over the next four years. This investment will translate into new schools, new hospitals, new and upgraded roads, and new communications technology. Together with our partners, most notably, the Government of Canada, we will ensure that, instead of being an obstacle to growth, our infrastructure will be a catalyst to new, sustainable social progress and economic growth.

Nova Scotia's resource industries ... adapting to change

Agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture remain the economic heart of many Nova Scotia communities. These industries have consistently demonstrated that adapting to change in a modern, competitive economy requires risk, resourcefulness, and a willingness to learn.

My government created a separate ministry for agriculture to ensure a continued and renewed focus for this important industry. And we will continue to support the efforts of agri-food and seafood operations by helping businesses develop value-added products and adopt innovative new technologies and processes.

My government's new aquaculture development strategy, which includes a new federal/provincial aquaculture framework agreement, will help propel this promising sector forward over the next five years.

We will also work with the agriculture sector to review opportunities that move them to greater sustainability.

My government believes a prosperous future also depends on the careful management of our natural resources. Collectively, our forests, parks, minerals, and wildlife are a rich natural bounty that contributes to our identity, quality of life, and employment throughout Nova Scotia.

This year, we will ask Nova Scotians to help us define a comprehensive natural resources strategy: to participate in creating a vision for the future.

We will consult with them in the months ahead on four key topics: bio-diversity, forests, parks, and minerals.

We will listen carefully, mindful that there are many varied interests in the stewardship of our natural resources.

The public consultations will ensure that our strategy reflects the Nova Scotia we want today, and the Nova Scotia we want for our children and grandchildren.

Nova Scotia, a province that values diversity

My government knows the more diverse Nova Scotia becomes, the stronger it becomes.

To this end, my government will

- continue to implement the objectives of the Immigration Strategy, including work that increases the number of immigrants that are settling in Nova Scotia, helps newcomers adjust to their new lives, and supports the vital work that settlement organizations do to help immigrants feel welcome and at home
- continue to provide funding to not-for-profit organizations, community groups, and schools to help immigrant children succeed and to help their parents learn to speak English or French so they can find meaningful employment and more fully participate in their communities
- continue to advance and support programs in support of the French-Language Services Act to ensure that Acadian and francophone Nova Scotians receive government services and business-related information in their language of choice
- through the new Minister Responsible for Gaelic Affairs, celebrate the influence and rich contribution the Gaelic language and culture have made to Nova Scotia's heritage and work to meet the goals of the Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia
- expand the work of the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs by opening a satellite office in Cape Breton—the first of future regional offices planned for South West Nova, the Valley, and Central regions
- continue to work with the Mi'kmaq and other partners to advance the Mi'kmawey Debert, which aims to protect valuable and unique archeological resources, while developing opportunities to share the history and culture of the Mi'kmaq

- continue working towards the signing of a framework agreement to establish a negotiation process on matters related to Aboriginal rights, including Aboriginal title and treaty rights
- continue to work with the federal government and the Mi'kmaq to close the gap between the quality of life experienced by the Mi'kmaq and other Nova Scotians
- increase the diversity of the public service to ensure that government better represents the people it serves
- implement the Racial Equity Policy in elementary schools
- and develop a province-wide Heritage Strategy

Our environment, our energy, our people, our products

My government will make the environment a priority. We will demonstrate that a sustainable economy is a globally competitive economy. We will show how smart choices add up to real savings, lead to innovation, and improve quality of life. We will lead by example.

Nova Scotians know that the quality of life in our province is directly linked to the quality of our environment. My government will renew the Smart Energy Program to help Nova Scotians make better energy choices, lower their energy bills, and reduce our province's reliance on fossil fuels. We will also support efforts to generate electricity from renewable resources such as wind power and low-impact tidal-power technologies.

My government will continue to implement and build on the *Green Plan: Toward a Sustainable Environment*, which makes a key link between green values and economic opportunities.

My government believes that every Nova Scotian should have access to clean drinking water. We will build on the Drinking Water Strategy

with additional supports over the long term for people with well water and on-site septic systems. We will further provide capital infrastructure to improve and upgrade Nova Scotia's septic treatment facilities.

My government will lead by example through the Environmental Management Policy, which requires departments to incorporate environmental considerations into all policies, including a focus on procurement practices and energy efficiency.

And because my government knows the value and importance of preserving land for future generations, for supporting wildlife habitat, and for promoting eco-tourism, we will add five new nature reserves to Nova Scotia's diverse land base, thanks to the generosity of private land owners.

My government will aggressively market our province's unique advantages. We will foster and promote sustainable business and environmental practices. And we will practise what we preach.

My government will seize growth opportunities, build on Nova Scotia's strengths, and eliminate obstacles. We will govern with the right balance of traditional values and new ideas.

And, together, we will build a more modern, more competitive, and greener province.

Better relations ... better results

My government knows that we can better respond to the needs and aspirations of Nova Scotians when all levels of government work more co-operatively.

We look forward to a productive partnership with the new federal government and to building stronger relations with all of our municipalities.

Our goal is to ensure that the federal government treats Nova Scotia fairly, and that it recognizes and supports the priorities of Nova Scotians.

My government will provide municipalities with more assistance in addressing the infrastructure needs of their communities.

My government understands that meeting the needs of Nova Scotians is a responsibility of all levels of government, and we will lead by example.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my government looks to the future with optimism:

- Confident in the knowledge that, together with Nova Scotians, we can overcome the challenges that lie ahead.
- Confident in the knowledge that Nova Scotians are resilient and resourceful, caring and compassionate.
- Confident in the knowledge that our sense of community is strong and our pride in what it is to be a Nova Scotian is unquestioned.

My government looks to the future with optimism, knowing that the values we share, the vision we embrace, and the course that we have set will lead to a better, stronger, more prosperous Nova Scotia.

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